

RUSSIAN-ENGLISH WORD SQUARES

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The Russian alphabet, called Cyrillic, is "reported to have been invented" by St. Cyril in the 9th century. He assigned one letter to each different sound that he heard spoken -- no S for both s and sh, no C for both c and k, no OUGH for uff, ow, off, etc. At the turn of the 20th century there were 36 Cyrillic letters. In 1918 the Bolsheviks eliminated four letters entirely, and about 98 per cent of a fifth, leaving only 32 for current use. Of these 32, twelve look like our English letters, but are not necessarily pronounced the same. Six letters, A, E, K, M, O, and T, do have our same sounds, but the other six, B, H, P, C, Y, and X do not -- they are pronounced v, n, r, s, oo and ch (as in the German ach), respectively.

Certain words, using the two-way letters above, sound and mean exactly the same in both languages. We have ATOM and MAMA, which mean atom and mama in Moscow, Ohio and Moscow, Russia. There is also one longer word, with eight two-way letters, that intrigues American tourists. They come back and say, "Every place in which we ate was called 'Pecktopaw'". Indeed, their word PECTOPAH is pronounced restoran, and all you need is a final T to get restaurant.

There is one characteristic of Russian nouns which must really help Russian wordsmiths. In America we have nouns like BELL, BOOK, CANDLE which have only those singular forms plus BELLS, BOOKS, CANDLES, the plurals. But not Russian nouns! In general, they have singular and plural forms (like ours), but there are three types of masculine nouns, four types of feminine, and four types of neuter. Add to this the fact that they have six cases, with mostly different case endings, and one has an average of nine different word choices or spellings for each Russian noun. What a bonanza for the Russian crossword puzzle constructor in Omsk or Tomsk!

Using these twelve two-way letters, I have constructed several word squares which will mean one thing to the Russian reader and something entirely different to the American reader. Because some of the Russian words are recognizable when pronounced (like PECTOPAH), I have also included (in parentheses) the pronunciations.

	Russian meaning	English meaning
O H	he (on)	interjection
H O	but (no)	interjection

	Russian meaning	English meaning
P O M	rum (rom)	bang
O H O	it (ono)	interjection
M O T	spendthrift (mot)	saying
B O H	out (von)	var. of <u>boo</u>
O C A	wasp (osa)	South American wood
H A M	to us (nam)	ham
T O M	volume (tom)	tomcat
O T O	from (oto)	Siouan people
M O P	pestilence (mor)	mop
A T O M	atom (atom)	atom
T A P A	city near Omsk (Tara)	bark of a tree
O P A H	city in Algeria (Oran)	elliptical fish
M A H A	Russian river (Mana)	sambar deer
P A H O	early (rano)	Hopi prayer stick
A T A P	city in Manchuria (Atar)	nipa palm
H A B A	city in Japan (Nava)	broad bean
O P A H	city in Algeria (Oran)	elliptical fish
O P A H	city in Algeria (Oran)	elliptical fish
P O T E	army company (rote)	to push or shove
A T O M	atom (atom)	atom
H E M E	city in Mauretania (Neme)	deep red pigment

In the final square above, the Russian words POTE and HEME are both written in the singular prepositional case, which follows the preposition B (in).

It is decidedly more difficult to construct double word squares, in which the horizontal words are all different from the vertical ones.

H A	Hor at (na)	Hor interjection
O H	he (on)	interjection
	Ver but (no)	Ver interjection
	on the contrary (an)	interjection
O T O	Hor from (oto)	Hor Siouan people
C O P	litter (sor)	policeman
A M E	Siberian city (Ame)	obs. var. of <u>aim</u>
	Ver wasp (osa)	Ver South American wood
	volume (tom)	tomcat
	Russian river (Ore)	to open

As in the third four-by-four square above, the words AME and OPE are in the sixth, or prepositional, case, commonly used after about a half-dozen prepositions.

All the English words can be found in the Second or Third editions

of Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. The Russian words are in V. K. Mueller's Russian-English Dictionary (822 pages, Russian-English only), or the Russian Concise Geographical Encyclopedia (2719 pages), an authoritative source of worldwide place-names and economic features.

The author welcomes any additions to the above (the field is wide open), and a five-letter regular word square would be unique. Maybe this will start some people to making English-French or English-German word squares -- maybe even English-Hungarian or English-Finnish. These squares ought to be easier to make because the alphabets of these languages are similar to English.

UNSPEAKABLE RHYMES, ETC.

This is the title of a paperback booklet published in 1976 by Stan Payne, containing a collection of three different types of wordplay: Unspeakable Rhymes, Respelt Virses, and Miss-split Words. The concepts are best illustrated by examples:

Job Seeker Doctor Livingstone, I presume?
Please read over my resume!

Budgie We're starting on a search
For beard which left our pearch,
Lest he may smearch a bearch,
Or drop in on the chearch!

Bulletin He's making a bait trap
For fish. Watch the carp-
enter!

The first type of wordplay (sight rhyme) was developed in a poem by Hedy Pachter in the 1968 Word Ways; the second is a device sometimes used by limerick-writers. His work was featured in The National Observer of August 2 and October 11, 1975. The booklet can be obtained for \$3.95 post-paid from Stan Payne, Box 306, Breckenridge, Colorado 80424.